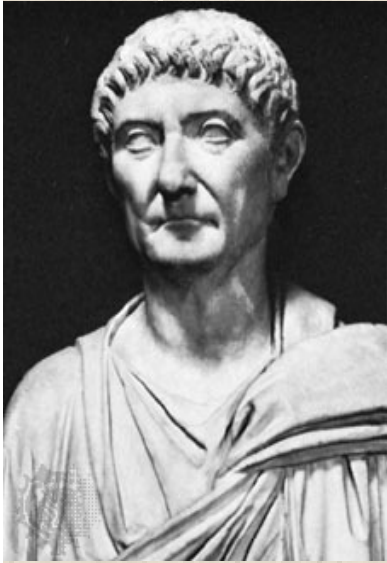


Lesson 14 The Age of Christian Empire: The Impact of Constantine

The Great Persecution



Diocletian



Galerius

- In the years between 67 and 312 AD the Roman political state conducted 10 imperial persecutions against Christians.
- Constantine's rise to political prominence immediately followed what is perhaps the worst persecution of Christians inflicted by the dual emperors of Diocletian and his junior partner Galerius.
- Therefore, for the first 250 years of its history the Church had vacillated between periods of persecution and toleration. Many Christians meet in secret and underground to avoid detection from the Roman authorities.

The Conversion of Constantine

- Much of what we know about *The Life of Constantine* comes from the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea, a Christian writer and historian who lived in the first half of the 4th century.
- While contemplating his options just before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Eusebius reports that Constantine saw the appearance of a glittering cross in the heavens above the following inscription, “Conquer by This.”
- Heeding the advice of this premonition, Constantine marched his troops into battle under the sign of the cross and won a resounding victory thereby becoming emperor of Rome. “This marked the first time in history, that the cross was smeared with the blood of a battle for human power.”

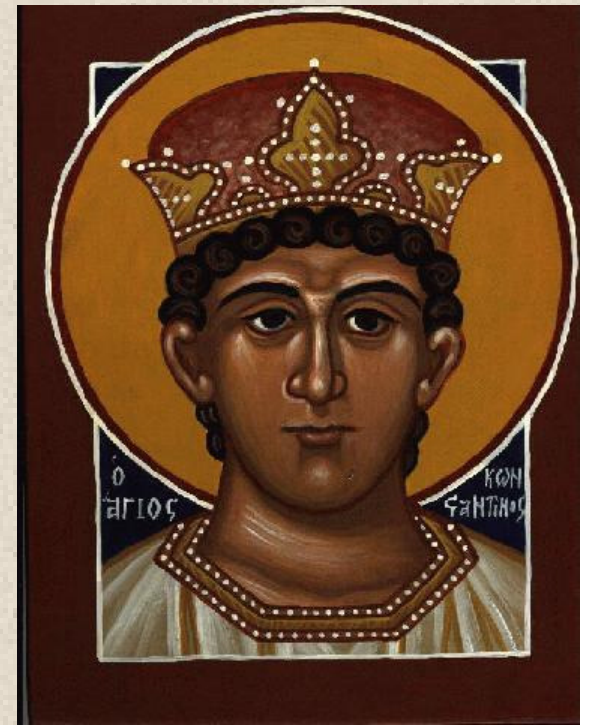


The Edict of Milan

- After his military victory at Rome on October 27, 312, Constantine, in conjunction with his eastern colleague Licinius, published in January, 313, from Milan, an edict of religious toleration. (Schaff, 29) The Edict of Milan stated, “Our purpose is to allow Christians and all others to worship as they desire, so that whatever Divinity lives in the heavens will be kind to us.” (Jones, 38)
- Famous Church historian Philip Schaff offers the following summation of the Edict. He states, “The edict of 313 not only recognized Christianity within existing limits, but allowed every subject of the Roman Empire to choose whatever religion he preferred. At the same time the church buildings and property confiscated in the Diocletian’s persecution were ordered to be restored, and private property-owners to be indemnified from the imperial treasury.” (Schaff, 30)

Did He Really Convert?

- The legitimacy of Constantine's conversion is still hotly debated by modern historians and theologians. Did his faith in the Christian God go beyond an opportunistic belief that here was a source of military, political, and perhaps metaphysical power?
- Others view Constantine as a great military general, leader of men, and consummate politician but not a Christian. "It has been observed by one cynic that to the superstitious all religion are equally true, to the skeptic all religions are equally false; but to the politician, all religions are equally useful. Such was the case with Constantine." (Barlow, 148)



Impact on the Church



- Christian build churches and basilicas.
- Pagan temples turned into churches.
- Full Catholic liturgy develops.
- Constantine grants favors of Bishops.
- Pagan traditions and practices enter the church.
- Believers lost site of the immediacy of Christ's return paving the way for postmillennial theology.
- Church power structure copies imperial Rome's
- Organized church of Christendom persecutes Bible believing Christians.